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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 001730

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SUBJECT: MAY 1 UPDATE ON CROSSINGS ISSUES

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Brig. Gen. (res.) Baruch Spiegel on May 1 briefed the Ambassador, USSC Head General Dayton, and EU-BAM head of Mission General Pistolese on his recent trip to Washington. Spiegel said the GOI will issue a formal position on which assistance projects can continue. He said the GOI remains interested in tunnel detection technology and noted suspicious activity near Kerem Shalom and an Egyptian report of an underground tunnel near Rafah. The Ambassador said that such instances underscore the urgency of moving forward on a tunnel detection system. Spiegel said that discussions regarding a customs protocol are ongoing at the highest political levels of the GOI. General Dayton said it is important to get a formal GOI decision on whether Israeli officials will join a meeting of the AMA's Security Working Group if the Palestinian side is represented by officials from the Office of the PA President on the new Border Crossing Administration under his control. Dayton noted that donors are strongly supportive of strengthening the PA President and entities under his control. End summary.

TRIP TO WASHINGTON

12. (C) On May 1, Brig. Gen. (res.) Baruch Spiegel briefed the Ambassador, USSC Head General Keith Dayton, and EU-BAM head of Mission Lt. Gen. Pietro Pistolese on his recent trip to Washington. He said that a team of seven-eight Israelis was invited by the Brookings Institute to Washington. They also met with members of Congress, DAPNSA Elliott Abrams, and State Department officials, including Assistant Secretary David Welch. Spiegel said that the GOI is still analyzing which foreign assistance projects should continue. After the analysis is complete, he said, the GOI will issue a formal position. Spiegel said the Israeli Ambassador in Washington will be in contact with U.S. officials on this matter.

TUNNEL DETECTION

13. (C) Spiegel said that the GOI remains interested in tunnel detection technology and hopes to meet with a U.S. expert who will be visiting Amman in the near future. General Dayton said that he would also soon travel to Amman and would encourage the security expert to visit Israel. Spiegel said the GOI still wants to send a team of security experts to the U.S. to check out tunnel detection systems; the Israeli Ambassador and Defense Attach in Washington are handling this issue. He noted that Israeli officials are investigating suspicious activity near Kerem Shalom (which may or may not be a tunnel) and that Egyptian officials have reported that there is a tunnel near Rafah. The Ambassador interjected that such cases underscore the urgency of moving forward on a tunnel detection system.

14. (C) Spiegel noted the well-publicized incidents in which Palestinian police prevented a terrorist attack at Karni last week. While the Israeli government applauds the actions of the Palestinian police, he said, it is nonetheless concerned by the fact that the owner of the stolen car used in the attack had not been detained. Spiegel said that close to one ton of explosives were in the car and, despite press reports to the contrary, none of the five terrorists involved in the incident were apprehended. He said that the GOI would like to see the USSC-organized security meetings at Erez continue and would like to isolate all the crossings from security threats. General Dayton said that he would also like to see the security meetings, like the one held in Erez a month ago, continue. Moreover, Dayton said he wants to organize a meeting of the Security Working Group called for in the Agreement on Movement and Access. He would, however, first like to know whether Israeli officials will meet with Palestinian officials from the Office of President Abbas or the Border Crossing Administration, which is under his control. Spiegel replied that this was a policy matter well above his pay grade, but he undertook to forward it to the incoming GOI for a decision. (FYI: MFA CoS Yaki Dayan told the Ambassador May 2 that he had already received Spiegel's report on the meeting and would brief his minister on Dayton's request.)

NEW BORDER AGENCY

15. (C) EU-BAM Head of Mission Lt. General Pietro Pistoiese said that the new Border Crossing Administration under Abbas officially has been formed, but may exist only on paper. General Dayton said that the border agency has an administrator and claims to have 1,600 employees. He said that before funding, training, or equipping such a force, he wants to do a thorough assessment of the organization. Pistoiese said that the presidential guard currently at the Rafah crossing may not be getting a regular salary. He suggested that Rafah could be self-financing or there may be a way to provide funding directly to the agency. The Ambassador said that perhaps the BCA could make Rafah self-supporting through user fees.

CUSTOMS PROTOCOL

16. (C) Pistoiese said that the Egyptians are ready to accept exports from Gaza at Rafah, but do not want to proceed without the Israelis being on board. Spiegel said that the Egyptian Ambassador told him that Egypt is waiting first for the GOI and the PA to reach an agreement. He noted that the Ambassador had been working to help the two sides reach a customs protocol. Spiegel said that the customs protocol is being discussed at the highest political level of the Israeli government, and the GOI may have something ready by next week. The Ambassador said that the customs agreement is another aspect of the issue of whether the GOI can deal with Mahmud Abbas separately from the Hamas-led PA.

17. (C) General Dayton briefed the group on the donors meeting in London on April 27. He said that the more than 12 organizations in attendance strongly support strengthening the PA presidency and entities under the president, as well as oppose doing anything with Hamas. General Dayton said that he has plans to build the capacity of the presidential guard and the border agency as well as encourage the Palestinian security forces to move into northern Gaza to deal with the Kassam rockets, moves which the donors strongly support. It would be helpful, however, General Dayton said, to know if the GOI objects strongly to such plans. He said the goal is to create a force that could help with security at the crossings, and not pose a threat to Israel. General Dayton said he would talk to Israeli General Kaplinsky before proceeding with any plans. Spiegel said that the IDF would continue working "professionally" with Palestinian contacts, at the "working level" until the new GOI set its policy.

INCREASE IN EU-BAM PERSONNEL

18. (C) Pistoiese said that he has asked for more monitors. He said that by the end of May EU-BAM monitors and armed security personnel should total 79. Currently, the monitors work for 11 hours each day, but should increase that to 15 and then 18 hours when all the new personnel are in place. (However, Pistoiese told the Ambassador on May 2 that operations would remain limited to daylight hours for the time being in light of a terrorist threat against the EU/BAM reported by Egypt.)

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JONES